SIGNET

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SIGNET STAFF 1998

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Michelangelo believed in the cryptozoology of stone,
that the artist's hammer was a password, a key to open,
to peel back marble like fingers around a boiled egg,
so, skinned by the knowledgeable, the grateful beast,
new-born, would pass through her shadow, exit through a door
of shaved rock, as though freed from an ogre.

The statue, he said, is already there;
I only liberate it.

What he forgot though, what I must believe he forgot,
not ignored out of unkindness, as he chalkwhite moved
with symphony joy, fierce as the soldier throwing
wide the gates of concentration camps, was that
these animated leftovers, stone on floor, a marble footprint,
the mold of a breast, a shelf for a pair of horns, shrunk

cringing, and with the eternal epiphanies of rock
knew that what they thought loved them, *was* them more
than Siamese twins, than water passing down the throat
with the caress of muscles, saw them not as partner,
but prison, as the skin of orange and not its other half.

Nights I slept against his arm, my cheek imprinting
against the clapping finger clatter of his watch, as puppies
hold to clothwrapped clocks, pretending mother. But the wrist,
however close in the corporal system to blood,
is remote in the orbit of the heart. I forgot sometimes
that arteries, nearest to veins, and tangled, carry blood away,
are streets that walk away from favorite houses

Sunshine Ison

the barn across the street

R. Stewart Varner

The Fall of Eve

In Bible tale she play the Queen
The naked mother to our dust
If man build man from hammer-n-nail
She scorn from heaven with disgust
In paradise she roam with bosom bare
All God's eyes upon her skin
That shine like flat stone slicked with tide
Every breast her next of kin.

In Beauty tale she play the Goddess
With swollen nave and puckered lip
Cursed to mold her clay from his
Insides braced with borrowed rib
She grow the locks of artist's brush
They sculpt her shape, stripped and teased
Bathe her stains in perfumed paint
Her heart adorned, their sex appeased.

In Mother tale she play the Womb
A haven made from flesh and bone
Embracing her own second coming
Her nest become a child's home
In Mother tale she play the Wife
Nine stroke of month she warmed a soul
He hold a briefcase to his side
She hold a babe, a broom, a bowl.

In Skyscraper tale she play the game
She lead marches with slogan's politics
Worshipping shrines of Joan of Arc
Practicing tongues of liberal rhetoric
She throw her fists, she lose the fight
She hold her head, she lose the war
They lie down with her, they called the men
She lie down with them, she marked the whore.

She held the hands of men
Poisoned from her blood her maker bled
She dug fingernails deep to plant their trees
Finding broken bones and soil dead
And so she spread herself upon the blades
Veins outstretched like tangled roots
To offer breast and birth and brain
In exchange, they fed her fruit.

Ingrid Jungermann

Ranidae

Sky's grey slate creaks, rumbles, and gives way
to the cracked straws of light,
the boulder-breaking, and all
the rough needles of sound
slide up
from the slick, swollen bellythroat
of the bullfrog,
deeper than night, deeper
even than the rain, rattle-
down of sorrows.

Because, anyway, he is singing.

And whatever his reason,
if he has a reason, he does not
ask for anything,
for the storm to pass over,
for ground to be ground,
for the endless water at last to end.
I think he closes his eyes and in the darkness,
where he is becomes the sea, tumultuous,
and in the sea his voice the wave
which comes from beneath,
which does not drag down,
his voice the wave which carries
all things lost and broken, through,
unless they choose instead to drown.

Ashley Capps

Water, They Say

Water, they say, is so strong
(a square foot weighs 64 pounds)
it can knock you down;
you drown.
Water is the throbbing pain
for things I have and don't have,
the soft part of my brain
that will always wonder:

What would have become
of me, a savage
plant, iris
leaves and veins
sprawling in all directions,
their damp unnoticed paths extending
among rows of roses?

So, here I am trying to sweep
up the fragments of last week,
first the uneasy strength of the of the shirt and tie
rumpled on the floor, the shadowy
electronic hospital room, the pills
rattling in their amber bottle.

The whirr of the plane
that flies overhead
as I drive into a nearing inky darkness,
cross paths with it, that is the water
I used to chase on the pebbly
beach. I remember
that painting in Annecy
the one of miles and miles of ocean
and a large and shiny vessel
appearing so small,
being jostled by the textured turquoise oil.

Today I keep looking up from the waves,
expecting to see something bluer, cleaner,
a memory, those little pebbles,
but they have left. I look around,
the soapy crests, the magic
of the sand blowing down
beyond me into nothingness,
I look around at what I have become :
fire against water, water against fire.
I await the grit of the sand against my skin.

Leigha Basini

2 ton weight limit

R. Stewart Varner

Well string

With rug burned elbows and
My hand print in the carpet,
I wonder about the newness of the water in the walls.
When you sing my story of another to me
I regret that I will watch myself slyly miss again.
Stars on wrappers used to mean something
for what I could send away :
like how long it took me
to squeeze my eyes into a spider web,
like how long it took me
to panic at the smallness in the doorway
and blink my way out of it,
like what song I hover over the vent for,
like how strong you would like my safe and hazy theory to be.
Whether or not I wash the next window
has everything to do with
forgetting why I came down the stairs,
and nothing to do with the escape saying
we are gone
and I am faster than this train.

Katherine Furler

Music Lessons

Mama kept company with Rodgers and Hammerstein
and Bach. Her lyric soprano would lift
my pillow, bearing my sleepy
head away to "Some Enchanted Evening."
I would dream of meeting a stranger
as she met Dad. I would "fall hard
on my knees" in love, as she did
for Dad's bluer than Paul Newman eyes
and shock of white blond hair.
Mama sang and played the piano for him.
His music lessons had begun.

Dad proved a difficult pupil, inclined to
crouch over a songbook and mumble the music.
But in private, Dad's pleasant baritone
would boom, "Beautiful Dreamer wake unto me"
beneath the shower head. Mama said she blushed
to think of lessons learned
duet became trio.

As we children came, Mama taught us chords while
we made beds and dusted, our choir of two
barely heard over vacuum and washer.
She trained us well to march the aisle
in time to her fingers and feet as they pumped
harmony each Sunday on the organ.
Our small pipes chased the melodies of
hymns we could not yet read, but heard
with perfect pitcher ears.

Our noisy chorus rose higher than yeast
as Mama bestowed Irish blessings
on our behalf round the kitchen table.
Her diaphragm sustained each clear tone,
with hopes of weddings and grandchildren
she would cuddle, but never babysit.

she would cuddle, but never baby-sit.

Those dreams, like my pillow,
mildewed from too many nights falling
asleep with wet hair.
Her goodnight kisses confirmed
that she would cling to us
like the guards at Blarney Castle who
held her ankles as she leaned out and
over the window ledge and kissed
the stone. Therein lay our gift
of spoken song, she said.

Her soothing solo once muffled a January
night for this 15-year-old's grasshopper legs,
we hopped onto her lap after Great Grandma died.
We could never get too big for her lap, she said.
Later I sight read the music of that night
in the alcohol air of Mama's hospital room.
I held her as she wept, no breath left to sing.
She was the daughter as I crooned
the mother song to her.

Disease drew each strained note Mama exhaled
farther away. We three sobbed in unison.
It is the most difficult music to sing.
I do not sleep well in a quiet house.

Colleen Turnage

Little Sister

She told me to close my eyes, listen
LISTEN to the harmony, learn it
I have, she says, *I am a new person*
And she bends to me with her knee
poking mine and I do, I close my eyes
as she whispers, hisses
in my ear— *Lisssten, you can do thisss*— and I am in pain but
I gnash my teeth and I listen and I learn. I cannot
sing as well as my sister, *I cannot sing*
like you say *you can,* I say with my eyes
closed. LISTENing to a song I used
to love, sinking down to that small
size of a little sister again and I try
but I fail in keeping them
behind my eyes. They come from my throat, beating
and pricking until they reach the backs of my lids, and then.
And then it's done. They squeeze
through and slide down the cheeks of a conquered girl,
that chubby freckled sister with straight bangs,
because I did not want to listen. And she
asks *Are you crying?* And I smile through them
and say *no, no, just listening*
to a song I once was.

Ingrid Jungermann

Forster let his eyes wander from his feet to the floor and up, looking around but not often *seeing* anything. Tabloids, a candy aisle, a pyramidal stack-up of soda six-packs. The grocery world. Forster tried not to pay too much attention, tried not to *think* too much, because that got him into trouble. Then something caught his eye. A pink bottle of calamine lotion, sitting askew in someone's handcart as they passed, next to a few boxes of frozen vegetables.

Running, playing, screaming as kids do, going to suck the honeysuckle, stumbling, falling, hearing the hum. The hum of little wings.

Calamine lotion, he grunted quietly. Perfect for bee stings.

It was so easy to let your mind just *drop*, returning to unimportant memories, standing in line like this. The monotony, the shifting from foot-to-foot, lets the mind wander to some dark places. Places sticky with unpleasantness. Like Sheryl. Laying there like a crumpled piece of bleached paper. God, how he hated to see her like ~

~ no. Hell no. He wasn't going to do this. No need to torture oneself. What he was going to do was think about the little things, and just stand here in line, with his goods. His six-pack of Guinness, his Mr. Bubble. He hoped no one would notice. What would they think, a fifty-plus, paunch-bellied nobody staring at the floor with beer and bubble bath? They'd think he was a retard. He couldn't have that.

Christ, three more people to go, all old, all with their seven items or under stretched to the limits, their feeble old hands trembling like leaves in a breeze as they lifted their things onto the black grocery conveyor. Feeble and slow. But

that wasn't exactly fair of him, now was it? If Sheryl could only hear him now, she'd cry.

The tears didn't come right away, they stayed back as something pelted his face, his leg, his arm. Then the stinging began. The tears waited to fall as he tore away.

"Goddamned, man, I'm in a grocery store, that's where, why you –"

Forster felt someone bump into him. He turned around, found some scrawny black guy with cheekbones like bullets standing there, a cellular phone pressed between his shoulder and his ear, and his basket in Forster's back.

"Sorry, man," the guy explained, giving this half-cocked grin. Forster just nodded, turned back around so he didn't have to pay attention. The guy's voice continued: "Anyway, goddamnit, listen to me. I'm in a grocery store, that's why the reception's all fucked up. Yeah, I got the car. Naw man..." And the voice trailed off as Forster watched an old man with hair everywhere but his scalp sign his check, turn it over, and hobble off. The line moved up a foot.

Feeble, slow.

He cursed himself.

Felt like the ground was molasses, melting with every footstep, unable to go anywhere but right there, where the bees were, clouding up, one getting in his mouth.

The cashier was an Oriental woman who looked like a toy. She couldn't have stood over four feet. Pale face, lipstick the color of ketchup. Bowing a little, grinning acutely, not really speaking any English. Maybe that's why things were going so slow.

Slow, slow, slow. He hoped Sheryl wasn't waiting too eagerly. That look she got on her face when she was disappointed, half of it sinking down, the other half staying where it was because it had to. It burned him inside with hot brands of shame.

This big woman was up next, probably mid-sixties.

Forster was surprised she could squeeze through the aisle. And all her food was diet. Yogurt. Rice cakes. And douche, but he didn't want to think about that. There were always things not to think about, and that was definitely one of them.

He was bumped again.

"Shit, sorry man," came the next apology from the wiry black fellow. The guy shrugged, winked, and resumed his conversation on the phone. "Yeah, so this nigger sells me a car where the gas gauge shakes all like an epileptic, don't tell me shit about gas, y'see? Whaddya mean? Naw, you ain't a nigger, and I ain't a nigger. What's the difference? Fuck, man, you don't know?"

Forster just eyed his Guinness, letting his salivary glands buzz with moist desire. Soon, he imagined, he'd be home, and he could settle back with a couple of the dark drinks, sipping them leisurely while watching fishing, or maybe stock car racing. All after he gave Sheryl a bath, of course. God, he hoped she wouldn't be upset with him...

They followed him, biting and stinging, no matter where he ran. He couldn't think of anything but the fact that he was going to die, and no one was there to help.

The guy behind him was still talking, more loudly now, more animated. "Shut up for a minute and I'll tell you! Here, wait a minute."

Forster was tapped on the shoulder. He turned around. The guy was looking at him.

"You know the difference?" the man asked.

Forster just stood there, looking at him, not sure if he was being talked to.

"C'mon man, you know or not?" He put his mouth to the phone. "Bet he doesn't."

"Know what?" Forster asked, unsure where this was going.

"The difference between a nigger and everybody else."

Again, Forster stood there, blankly.

"Speak up, yes or no?"

"This a trick question?" Forster asked, eyeing up the black guy suspiciously. The guy shot him a frustrated glance.

Forster decided to answer: "No, then, I don't."

"That was easy, and guess what?" the guy asked, grinning like a fox. "I'm gonna tell you. A nigger's like a parasite. Hanging on, suckin' blood, livin' off others because he's too afraid to live for himself. But a regular man, like me and Jonesy here –" He held up the phone, as if to illustrate who Jonesy was. "– we regular folks, because we know how to do things for ourselves, y'see? We survive on our own, no help from nobody. Follow me?"

Forster swallowed, and turned around.

"I don' think the guy gives a shit, but you hear me..." left the voice of the guy.

He didn't like being trapped like that. But a momentary wave of relief spilled over him as he realized he was next in line. Thank Christ. He could get away from here, go see Sheryl. It was decided, too, that he'd never come here again. There had to be somewhere better.

The toy woman held out her tiny wriggling hands and Forster gave her the six-pack and the bubble bath. She dashed them over the scanner, eliciting little *boops* from the register, and she began placing them in bags.

"Seveh-fitty-tee," she said, squinting and smiling.

"What?" Forster asked, his wallet in his hand.

"Seveh-fitty-tee," she announced again, still seemingly happy.

Great, Forster thought, then realized he just had to look at the register display. In red LCD letters, it said: *$7.53*. That was easy enough. He dug his stubby fingers into his wallet, and found a five spot, a quarter, some pennies. There had to be more. He flipped past a few receipts, a couple crumpled business cards. Ten dollars. There was a ten dollar bill in there, hiding in there.

"Seveh-fitty-tee!" the toy woman said, her smile vanishing and the voice becoming more insistent.

"Hold on," Forster said, but he knew there wasn't a ten in there anymore. It was either hiding real good, or it just wasn't there. Where could he have spent it? "Just a minute, now."

More rifling revealed no more money.

He wouldn't be able to go to the circus that night, because he'd be bedridden, all stung-up. He knew the fact as his feet struggled with the ground to propel him away.

"I don't know if I have it," Forster said, trying to smile, but failing. This wasn't going very well. "All's I've got is a five and some change, will that do?"

The Oriental woman grinned. Forster felt a twinge of hope. Then she said: "Seveh-fitty-tee, now, seveh-fitty-tee."

"I... uh," Forster said, swallowing a hard lump. "I guess I'm going to have to take the six-pack back, and then can I come right back to pay?"

"Have to wait line," the cashier chirped.

This was bad. He really wanted his beer – hell, he could already *taste* it. It was one of the few things that got him through a night. He could come back, but home was over ten minutes away, and traffic and lines and such...

Forster felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the black guy.

"See now, Jonesy," the guy was saying into the phone. "Here's perfect example of a nigger. Man comes to the grocery store, don't even bring the cash for his booze or his bubble bath. Yeah man! That's what I said, bubble bath, shit is crazy." He took the phone away from his mouth and gave Forster a piercing look and a curt, clipped nod. "That's right, you a nigger. How's it feel? Know the difference now, old man?"

Red embarrassment rose to Forster's cheeks. How could someone be talking to him like this? It wasn't fair. He'd put in fifty-three years old life, and who was this guy? Or even this cashier, demanding something he'd always been good for in the past?

"You don't understand," Forster pleaded with the cashier *and* the man behind him. "My wife, she had a stroke four months ago, and she just loves this bubble bath, it's not for me, and I gotta have my beer because it's one of the things.

You know, the *things*. C'mon, I need a little understanding here."

"Seveh-fitty-tee, now," the toy repeated.

"Nigger, nigger, nigger," the black man chided.

He pictured Sheryl, waiting for him. He imagined the beer going down. He didn't want to go home, but he had to go home. *Had to.* Desperation quietly assaulted him.

Had to get out of here. Had to escape.

Running away, do you ever really run away? Thirteen stings, red welts raised in flesh and mind. Hurt, wounded, stinging, gone.

No, forget that idea.

He went past the conveyor, past the register. He grabbed his bag.

"No, you no take, seveh-fitty-tee!" The Oriental woman cried.

"Gonna start stealing, Pops?" the black man winked.

Forster reached into the bag. He felt for the Guinnesses, and found the top of one of the bottles. He got a firm grip on it, wrapping his hand around the bottle's neck. His hands were sweating now. He prayed it didn't matter.

The toy woman grabbed for the microphone.

The black man laughed.

Forster brought the bottle out, raised it above his head. It came down in an arc, and hit the black man right above the ear. Shit-brown glass exploded out in streams of foamy beer. It sounded like a gunshot going off.

The cashier shrieked a high-pitched whine and the black man crumpled to the floor, his phone spinning away from him.

"Go to hell," Forster breathed, and grabbed his bag, and ran for the exit. He wasn't stung this time, he repeated to himself, he wasn't stung this time...

Believer

I don't know where it comes from,
but your life will change forever.
You will turn to simpler miracles, begin to believe
in the god of eyelashes,
who is also the god of spider webs,
and spring. Touch this tree— when the light, late-summer
slices like a blade of golden glass
through fields, through forests, through the grass
that you are standing on and colors all of it.
Look up into the lightshot shafts of leaves,
someone you hold dear is sick or sorrowing.
You are dazzled by thoughts of love.
You want to forget the world.

What you remember is enough
to wonder what happens those mornings
there is no light but light
like watercolor grey. Blue fog as thick as sea
easing up the sides of buildings, faces, even,
and mountains, towns, the deep, coal rivers
seen all as from a high place where there is nothing
but to gesture and be silent.

Now you stand alone in miles of wheat,
so this is the end
or this is the beginning, and you are the winner,
there is a wreath of gold around your neck,
and victory, red, and still
wet on your forehead.

But you are looking back.

If you don't know what to do
with your hands anymore,
ask the water to dance with you
and it will. It will rush up even to these fields,
or wherever you are going.
Where should I find you if I were to look?
So many places, so many things for you to be,
I will go to the shiny green nets of the trees
and all the wings they catch,
and the crumbling red houses of ants, the slick, unsteady logs
with their lichens like brown lace, I will go
to the fish rinsed and tossed by the sea,
to the sea itself.

Ashley Capps

the house that isn't there anymore and the tree that is **R. Stewart Varner**

My Mother's Stroke

It had been so many days,
me among mountains and olives,
you surrounded by peaches
in an ordinary routine.
Our first span of summer spent apart.
I called you, my source,
so often to paint a picture
of the artwork splattered
on such distant ground.
You said it sounded beautiful
and asked after my childish tears,
was I happy? Of course,
but your constant hands were missing
from the near heaven I found
in countries both of us had only
imagined.
I did not feel old enough to be gone.
And I never even had a childhood
nightmare like the one I lived
after our hug, surrounded
by strangers and suitcases.
Welcoming me back, you laughed.
Though only half your face smiled
and your arm would not reach
to close the car door.
I did not want to become Mykonos,
that island of windmills,
and I was afraid the airport security
and the city ambulance
would make me stand alone
before you even saw the pictures
from the disposable cameras you bought.
And Daddy began to cry,
only the second time I ever saw
his face distorted with love for another.
I still wonder what all the other families

thought or said as they packed their cars
and drove back into their lives,
slowing down to watch me hold
the hand of a police officer I'd never
see again while you were rushed away,
half of you telling me it was okay.

In the hospital we would not
have chosen for you
the doctors had no explanation.
Half of your body had just fallen
asleep but you were not gray
or old like the people who belonged
here with machines I didn't try
to understand.
You still laughed
when Dad had to feed you scrambled eggs
and you wore a gift of new pajamas,
said you must look awful
when friends visited.

At home you seem fine.
We all joke in personal stand-up
comedy routines about your temporarily
disabled arm but the pills
lining the counter
and the appointments that label
the calendar constantly replay
that movie scene we lived at the airport
next to a sign for the southbound highway.

Brooke Harshbarger

PROFESSIONAL
SAMPLE
TO GOD ALL THE GLORY
PROFESSIONAL LURES & TACKLE
SPINNERS · BAITS · HAIR JIGS
WHOLESALE · RETAIL ·

The Map

When the assignment was given
to draw a map of my life's journey
for the six-week workshop, titled
"Women Who Run With the Wolves,"
Part Five in a series,
I asked myself, "Why?"
No one would want to go there.
I refused to take it seriously
when told to apply meaningful names
to the mountains and valleys crossed
in my forty-six years of life.

I had shared my journal,
spoke of hurt, hatred, fleeting fear
and even wrote a fairy tale.
In Part One, I lit candles and
chanted my soul's honor. Namaste.
I drew pictures and made
a doll stuffed with blue moss
and pine needles, gathered in a pathless wood.
A clearly labeled map
is where I draw the line—
no pun intended.

Revelations are rare.
Guides come and go,
as do therapists
and friends.
Never having possessed a sense
of direction, being lost
is my frequent state of residence
If advised which way to turn
or the easiest route,
I find I follow Frost,
or that other drummer.

I could name a spot in Indiana
where formative years eroded
at The Church of the Pilgrim Holiness
where Mother took me three times a week
for sixteen years of training in
how not to be "of this world"
which eliminated most everything
so I never did belong and hated my mother.
If God really loved His people,
He would protect them from that place—
especially the children.

The Valley of Shame is where
babies of eighteen have babies,
while friends go to college
and have Ph. D.'s.
Two can rock and cry
at the same time.
If you *could* map the future,
maybe time wouldn't be wasted
trying to find the way back
to where you should have turned
right instead of left.

No one would want to travel
the OCD Husband Expressway
for twenty-five years,
through ten states and seventeen cities,
owning fifty-two vehicles,
two of which died on that
dark road to the night shift job
you worked to be home
caring for the baby
while he worked at his office
caring for the secretary.

I could use Burnt Sienna
to color the road to Survival
which all divorced women
must travel to pass from
the Crater of Destruction.
Clearly illustrate the psychiatrist's office
where, after three years in therapy,
you emerge to repeat the journey
in a six-week workshop, titled
"Women Who Run With the Wolves,"
Part Five in a series.

Gloria Shamblin

Yet a Hundred Indecisions and Revisions

We sleep in weighted wood,
our legs hovering and heavy with bright hurt.
You should not rest with me
to then travel and dance the fringes.
Throw the fear in front of you—
even now as you are two steps closer to it.
Take this fear you find so unfashionable
to the fields,
dig beneath the wait that dirties your hands.
Although it is an unborn harvest,
take from there
a taut hope that will not be pressed away.
For this year the frost was soon
and the greatness of these things
in each other is clawed underneath your fingers.

Katherine Furler

Harvest

From one impudent wink,
sand spins sensual layers
of opal light between its
clammy sheets to seduce
amas, whose lithe bodies
shoot down cold lapis depths,
driven by desire.
Fruit born now cradled
between shell hands,
small Aphrodites shine
like the full moon,
cresting iced waves.
Harvest begins.
Hear oars sing and slap
the ocean wake,
rise modest Venus
See yourself nude,
lounging on velvet night
with silken strands knotted
like Botticelli hair,
stringing hearts and eyes
along and up to pearly gates
that smile heaven.

Colleen Turnage

no trespassing **R. Stewart Varner**

Separation

Sand fleas snuggle in the slits of his fingers
as my father teaches me how to dig in, shovel out,
watch them scurry in every direction, searching
for the safety of salt water, the suction
of thick wet sand. It looks like madness.
Unleashed. Boundless. My hands
are only big enough to find remnants
of broken seashells, dead seaweed, empty homes
cracked in half by bigger fish.

My mother sits on a sheet that is speckled
in tar and sun-tanning lotion with a grin she's
forgotten about, watching her babies
not so baby anymore. She's frying
herself under the world, knowing
that the sun will spare her; she can see
danger a mile away.

Soon I will cry. Running from one
to the other, *here's my sand fleas, take them,* and
they just sit on opposite poles, dragging
us through the sand knowing they shouldn't
but they've never had to do this before.

Fish nibble on the tips of my long, skinny toes
that can pick up things like fingers; I have learned
to love their ugliness. I sit on a bench that was once green,
that used to hold families of five. It used to be solid.
Heavy. Capable. And I rock back and forth
knowing I shouldn't, tasting the salt water
I didn't mean to drink, releasing those things
I didn't mean to let go and realizing
that for ten years, *ten years,*
I have never remembered
like this.

Ingrid Jungermann

Mistaking the Sea for Green Fields

Ophelia, when she died,
lay in the water like the river's bride, all pale
and stark and beautiful
against the somber rocks,
her hair an endless golden ceremony.
She made the water sing for her, it flowed
over her folded arms.

Not so my father's sister Karen,
swollen in a day-old tub of water
when they found her,
needle tucked into the fold of her arm,
her last thing; it was a wing for her.
So everything went as nameless as the men
who lifted her naked from the tub,
or those who rolled her
into the mouth of the furnace,
which is what you get
when you don't get a service,
when your mother's years of grief
turn last to rage: *I won't pay for it.*
Leave me out of this. And even though
they finally said it wasn't suicide,
it was a mistake—
no one knew what to do
with all of that anger,
or in the end how not to blame her.

Even now, in her unmarked container.

People once believed a deeper reason
for the way, every few years,
the lemmings threw themselves in masses into the sea.
Some wondered: Were they weary of their lives,
could they, too, despair? Or like those second-vessel swine
when Jesus chose them, when he exorcised

that babbling-mouthed man of his demons
and sent those dark spirits tearing through
the bewildered hogs— the way *they* plunged?
The truth we know now:
they leave when food is scarce,
when they've grown too many;
they leave in search of a better life, believe
the roads they follow lead to new meadows,
a place to start over.

I think of Karen, feeding
and feeding her veins, how it is possible
she saw us all suddenly there— miraculous
and festive on some bright and other shore,
like the life she had been swimming toward
all along, trying to get right.
Like those sailors long ago,
that tropical disease, *calenture*—
when, far from everything they knew,
men grew sometimes delirious
and mistook the waving sea for green fields.
Rejoicing, they leapt overboard,
and so were lost forever,
even though they thought it was real, even though
they thought they were going home.

Ashley Capps

How We Are Given Over to Be Sea-Changed, How Our Hearts Grow Pearls

For a moment the two of you
are to me as Icarus,
falling in prisms of liquid wax,
is the sun. When I see you at night,
you are incandescent.

And in this world of little Astrologies, you are bird, trailing tail,
tropical, with heavy claws. You have kept your fingers clenched,
eagle girl, spent your life remaking your nest from cemetery
ribbon, replacing everything the wind took away every night
like those endless duties of a beloved hell.

You held me too tight even, the first night, when I wanted
nothing so much as to run into the ocean, to be eaten
quickly by the waves, when, always fire, I had found a new
element. Though I turned bear and snake you would not release me
and I too was flattened against the rain, unwilling, though safe.

Then the proper zodiacs became close,
you were given your German lion, *der Lowe,* and your fingers
relaxed, allowed keys and ropes and even my hand
to fall, like the returning bodies of fish, into the water.

Always you thought you owned enough body to give away,
enough skin to patch the wounds of your sisters,
but what we never know until it happens
is that love makes hybrids of us,
writes us into the mythologies.

So you, lost twin of one-half body, have found your other,
have made an egg, taken in the sand, the red
crabs, the unseen screaming monkeys, and made them
your world, your food until together you are born
as gryphon.

And at the moment of this birth, you will say,
as I say on these nights of my own incandescence,
You are what is inside me,
buried like a baby– you are what my hands
lift out of boxes, half-unfolded as the tissue
paper makes new bodies on the floor.

Sunshine Ison

How New We Are Driving Home

My thumb holds up the sky this night,
you are on the shifting ground.
Your face is open sliding through the smoke
that hovers above the swing,
and clouds of it make your eyes take on its facets and flexibility.
As the sparks crashed in my mirror
into the back deep street on the way here,
I thought they were like prints extinguishing,
like prints of how I collapsed on the smallest part
and tried like a milkman to fly.
This is the finality from a shaky windowsill,
how high noise and deepest landscapes
clear the ashes
that now rise celestial.
I allow the planks to move me
as your face forward clears the smoke
to tell me what it is you think tonight.

Katherine Furler

ROOMS
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